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Anthony F. Pinzone

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“BEYOND THE GILDED CAGE:” STAGED PERFORMANCES AND THE  
RECONSTRUCTION OF GENDER IDENTITY IN *MRS.DALLOWAY* and *THE GREAT*  
*GATSBY*

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Bachelor of Arts in English Literature

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This thesis is hereby approved for  
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“BEYOND THE GILDED CAGE:” STAGED PERFORMANCES AND THE  
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*GREAT GATSBY*

ANTHONY F. PINZONE

**ABSTRACT**

Although scholars have examined *Mrs. Dalloway* extensively in terms of gender performance, few critics of *The Great Gatsby* have explored Gatsby’s masculinity through gender studies. Using Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity, I argue that Mrs. Dalloway and Gatsby represent both actors and directors rehearsing a new gendered identity of the twentieth century. Through their roles as staged performers, I emphasize how seemingly minute tasks connect to larger social and political stakes of memory, celebrity status, and reappraisals of gender identity. I further assert that while both Mrs. Dalloway and Nick Carraway experience revelations and heightened imagination through death, neither achieve non- heteronormative gender identities. Still, Virginia Woolf and F. Scott Fitzgerald draw upon their own image of the artist to playfully tease a new hybrid-femininity and masculinity of self-invention beyond the gilded cage.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Virginia Woolf and F. Scott Fitzgerald are two twentieth-century authors whose works continue to resonate in the present. Incorporating modernist themes of cultural fragmentation, youth culture, and alienation, Woolf and Fitzgerald captured traditional values of the past and a new world emerging. Relying on creativity and imagination, both authors sought to rewrite the gender norms of men and women during this time period. Free expression was considered a defense against a culture slowly fading. For Woolf, Quentin Bell maintains, “Words, when they came, were to be then, and for the rest of her life, her chosen weapons” and that her use of spontaneous composition gave “her more pondered works greater force and directness” (vol. 1: 22; vol 2: 44-45). Thus, words when properly executed, could pave the way for a radical view of women. An outspoken voice for women of her class, Woolf believed that the political power belonged in the room in which women could call their own and “inhabit with the same freedom and independence as her brothers” (vol 2: 144). Yet, this by no means suggests that women should segregate from men—quite the contrary. Rather, women and men should work together and create a literature that “demands a comprehensive sympathy which transcends and comprehends the feelings of both sexes. The great artist is

Androgynous” (144).<sup>1</sup> In order to represent the essence of female equality, women must look beyond the constraints of modernist culture and insert their own image of femininity. Like her title character, Mrs. Dalloway, Woolf merges past ideas to capture a “comprehensive sympathy.” Hence, Bell notes that “She lives...half in a world of solid reality, half in a Victorian novel” and that “She belonged, inescapably, to the Victorian world of Empire, Class, and Privilege” (146, 186). Fostering women’s voices amongst a patriarchal society, Woolf indeed lived in a world of her own making.

Fitzgerald similarly depended on writing to express a new masculinity in America. Raised in a poor environment by a mother whose constant affection limited his manhood, and a father with financial woes, Fitzgerald’s familial life foreshadowed the “broken man” he was to become (23, 25). Still, not unlike Jay Gatsby, Fitzgerald relied on reinvention and vibrancy while also seeking a past dream. David S. Brown documents Fitzgerald’s words to his daughter, Scottie, that “When I was your age I lived with a great dream. The dream grew and I learned how to speak of it and make people listen” (15). Though he was enchanted by the Great American Dream, at the same time, Fitzgerald regarded the consumer culture a hindrance upon the talent of artists, believing that America gave “them no space to mature beyond their initial efforts” (280). Thus, he promoted his own version of history that was “chiefly color, personalities, and romance” (110). In what became known as the “Crack-Up” articles, Fitzgerald argued that America must revise its capitalistic beliefs or compromise artistic talent. Fitzgerald maintains that:

I saw the novel, which at my maturity was the strongest and supplest  
medium for conveying thought and emotion from one human being to

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<sup>1</sup> These notions of women by Woolf can be found in her extended essay, *A Room of One’s Own* (1929).



another, was becoming subordinated to a mechanical and communal art that, whether in the hands of Hollywood merchants or Russian idealists, was capable of reflecting only the tritest thought, the most obvious emotion (281).

Thus, the modern age had become increasingly materialistic, with the focus veering away from the individual. As suggested, it is not money that makes an individual but creativity. In order to endure the imminent future, Fitzgerald believed that the new generation needed to incorporate a past of romantic idealism. Like Gatsby, “the past never ceased speaking to Scott” (10). Instead, reliance on tradition and individualism enhanced a “poor boy” persona motivated by a vision that “extended beyond the ‘Roaring Twenties’ to encompass the whole of American history” (337).<sup>2</sup> Thus, as shown, Woolf and Fitzgerald valued talent over a limiting societal system. While Woolf rehearsed modernist literary aesthetics for women within a cultural elite, Fitzgerald critiqued capitalism and its effect on the artist. Thus, in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and *The Great Gatsby* (1925), Woolf and Fitzgerald playfully toy with new gendered identities during the early twentieth century through the rehearsals, repetition, and performances of their protagonists—performances that can best be understood through performance studies.



Understanding how performance has been expressed sheds light on the performers themselves. Scholars examining performance studies acknowledge that the term performance can be difficult to define. For performance theorists, actions and behaviors

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<sup>2</sup> While Brown documents that it was understood by everyone that “poor boys shouldn’t think of marrying rich girls” he notes that “Fitzgerald longed to look behind the closed curtains that suggested richer and rarer treasures” (62, 38).

are the primary focus of understanding an individual's behavior. Shana Komitee, a scholar of performance studies, notes that "To study a performance, then, is to set out to understand a complex event that is in-process, that moves and grows over time" and that "Performance Studies scholars see all of social reality as constructed by 'Doings'—actions, behaviors and events" (2). She points to the perspective of Richard Schechner, a Performance Studies scholar, as providing one definition. Komitee highlights some of the values of performance, outlined by Schechner, including entertainment value, to change or alter identity, to foster community, to heal, and to teach (4). Schechner defines performance as "twice behaved" or "restored" which have "been rehearsed or prepared, and are then 'framed, presented, highlighted or displayed' in a heightened fashion...A performance is the second (or third or fourth...) presentation of a practiced act" (7).

Erving Goffman lends a sociological viewpoint of performance. In his 1959 book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman argues that everything one does in daily life constitutes a performance since as Komitte highlights, "daily life, too, is choreographed" (11). Goffman defines performance as "all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way of the other participants" (15). In addition, Goffman terms "the pre-established pattern of action" during a performance as a "part" or "routine" (16). Through repetitive actions of performance, Goffman believes that a social relationship can arise, highlighting that individuals desire to control their surroundings and how others perceive them. A performance achieves this dilemma. He writes that "regardless of the particular objective which the individual has in mind and of his motive for having this objective, it will be in his interests to control the conduct of others, especially their responsive treatment of him"

(3). Stage presence, or what Goffman refers to as “front,” is everything about maintaining control, writing that:

When an individual plays a part he implicitly requests his observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them. They are asked to believe that the character they see actually possesses the attributes he appears to possess, that the task he performs will have the consequences that are implicitly claimed for it, and that, in general, matters are what they appear to be (17).

Being a performer means crafting a role that suits his/her stage presence since performance provides “an idealized view of the situation” (35). Through appearance and manner, Goffman maintains that performers must be convincing in order to persuade their audience of their social role. He writes that “Performers may even attempt to give the impression that their present pose and proficiency are something they have always had and that they have never had to fumble their way through a learning period” (47). Thus, for Goffman, performance is socially constructed and determines one’s place in the world.

Judith Butler expands upon Goffman’s model of performance by relating it more to gender. In her 1990 book, *Gender Trouble*, Butler argues that gender is constructed through repetitive gender performativity.<sup>3</sup> By performativity, Butler means “the way in which the anticipation of a gendered essence produces that which it posits as outside

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<sup>3</sup> In her Preface (1999) to *Gender Trouble*, Butler reveals that she obtained the idea of gender performativity from Jacques Derrida’s reading of Kafka’s “Before the Law.” Drawing from Derrida’s notion of “the anticipation of an authority,” Butler wondered “whether we do not labor under a similar expectation concerning gender, that it operates as an interior essence that might be disclosed, an expectation that ends up producing the very phenomenon that it anticipates” (xv).

itself” and that it “is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual” (Butler xv). Hence, gender is in continuous flux and an act to be performed in front of an audience. Butler defines the body as the medium of performances where “Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means” (185). By a “stylized repetition of acts,” Butler reinforces the idea that gender is not fixed, asserting that they “are internally discontinuous” so that “*appearance of substance* is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief” (191, 192). Hence, performativity and repetition are necessary in forming gender identity. Based on Butler’s assertions, Woolf and Fitzgerald demonstrate protagonists rehearsing and casually revising new gender roles. For Mrs. Dalloway, performance offers a vision of a hybrid femininity beyond domestic borders, while Gatsby’s colorful costumes of self-invention influence Nick’s own identity. Because Gatsby does not shy away from the spotlight, I focus on his performance as a male surrounded by spectacle rather than his under workings as a bootlegger. For the purposes of my paper, Butler’s theory of gender performativity outlines the theatrical metaphors of actress, actor, and directors necessary in gender reappraisal.



Butler’s theory of performativity represents the early stages of actor/actress and directors in Woolf and Fitzgerald’s earlier works. In her short story, “Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street” (1923), Woolf focuses on Mrs. Dalloway’s perspective as she transverses

through the London neighborhood.<sup>4</sup> While in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Mrs. Dalloway is on a quest to purchase flowers for her party, here she must buy gloves. Woolf writes that “Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the gloves herself” (“Bond Street”). The story showcases the material culture present during post-war Britain. For instance, Mrs. Dalloway remembers what her Uncle William told her that “A lady is known by her gloves and her shoes” (“Bond Street”). By pointing out this insertion of gloves and shoes, Woolf emphasizes the theatrical costume of her protagonist. Mrs. Dalloway’s surroundings become her stage, while she represents the performer. Time serves as Mrs. Dalloway’s antagonist, as she perceives that “Big Ben struck the tenth; struck the eleventh stroke. The leaden circles dissolved in the air” (“Bond Street”). Although the element of time and memory are present, Woolf does not depict Mrs. Dalloway as hostess and/or director with a sparkling dress in her initial short story. Judith P. Saunders correctly notes that she sees “no way to overcome the disadvantages of gender to which all the women around her have either succumbed or adapted” and that “she resigns herself to a life of wearing gloves and patronizing bazaars” (144). While Woolf points to subtle political stakes through Mrs. Dalloway’s gloves, her protagonist is not seen as utilizing the stage to its full capacity.

Fitzgerald also wrote another work that served as an early draft or precursor to *The Great Gatsby* entitled *Trimalchio*. James L. W. West III notes that “‘Trimalchio’ the title [Fitzgerald] almost chose for the published book, was the name of the ostentatious party-

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<sup>4</sup> Mrs. Dalloway also made a brief appearance on board the *Euphrosyne* in Woolf’s 1915 novel, *The Voyage Out* (Bell vol 2: 87).

giver in the *Satyricon* of Petronius” (*Trimalchio* xvii).<sup>5</sup> In his article, Michael D. Dubose underlines the key differences between the two novels, mainly centered upon Gatsby and Nick. In *Trimalchio*, Dubose highlights Gatsby’s confession and that “It is Gatsby who tells his story, chooses when to begin it, decides in what order it should proceed, and selects what information to include” (78). By including this scene in *Trimalchio*, Fitzgerald highlights that Gatsby has achieved self-awareness and, therefore, loses his overall purpose. While weakening his stage performance, he also interrupts Nick’s own quest of selfhood. In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald rewrites the scene of Gatsby’s confession and replaces it in Chapter VI, but strictly from Nick’s perspective. By incorporating these revisions, Fitzgerald strips “Gatsby of narrative authority” while Nick “gains more authority over the entire novel” (78, 74). Thus, it is “Nick’s story as much as Gatsby’s own” (79). Two years after residing in capitalist New York, Nick has detached himself from materialism and social class. Instead, Gatsby’s performance of romanticism and mystique are most remembered, possibly alluding to a new masculinity of the 1920s. In both “Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street” and *Trimalchio*, Mrs. Dalloway and Gatsby may begin to “repeat and revise” but they do not present the possibility of “performative accomplishment.” Still, both early works by Woolf and Fitzgerald serve as an introduction of staging and performance in twentieth century Britain and America.

Up to this point, no scholar has examined gender identity in both *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Great Gatsby* using Butler’s theory of performativity. Philip D. Beidler critically links the novels of Woolf and Fitzgerald, yet does not identify the role of

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<sup>5</sup> Besides *Trimalchio*, West III notes that Fitzgerald also considered “Among the Ash Heaps and Millionaires,” “Trimalchio in West Egg,” “On the Road to West Egg,” “Gold-hatted Gatsby,” and “The High-bouncing Lover” as possible titles. See *Trimalchio: An Early Version of The Great Gatsby* xi-xxii.

performance in terms of gender identity.<sup>6</sup> Instead, he focuses on the nature of war trauma, memory, and sacrifice, and how the protagonists suffer from what is now referred to as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Thus, for him, The Great War is the “great party crasher” (Beidler 7). While he highlights the role of elaborate parties, he details more of the insecurities and weaknesses of each protagonist rather than the elaborate show they are trying to portray. For instance, he describes Mrs. Dalloway as “but a step away from the clinical regime of the damaged and broken, the invalid” while similarly referring to Gatsby as the “mad Jay Gatsby” (13, 21). For Beidler, gender does not transform in the novels; rather, it disintegrates in the face of modernism.

In contrast to Beidler’s view of Woolf as depicting gender disintegrating, other scholars of *Mrs. Dalloway* tend to accentuate Mrs. Dalloway’s role through different theoretical lens. Critics have typically read her performance as consisting of death rituals and religious imagery; as a tool that allows her to narrativize other characters; as representative of Greenwich Time; as both psychological and sociological; and finally, with a feminist lens to explore the notion of the “room,” lingering “ghost bodies” of the past, and a Victorian self.<sup>7</sup> While critics have examined Mrs. Dalloway’s performance extensively, Jacob Littleton and Johanna X. K. Garvey showcase how her performance as artist and deep-sea diver begin to subtly undermine patriarchal control. In his article, Littleton argues that “both hostesses and artists must create a world that draws in the

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<sup>6</sup> Beidler is the only critic to analyze both *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Great Gatsby*. For more information regarding Beidler’s claim see his article, “The Great Party-Crasher: *Mrs. Dalloway*, *The Great Gatsby*, and the Cultures of World War I Remembrance,” 1-23.

<sup>7</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the differing perspectives of Mrs. Dalloway’s performance see Webb 279-298 and Guth 35-42; Edmonson 17-36; Barrows 262-298; Philipson 123-148 and McVicker 171-184; Stevenson 112-132, Moon 247-269, and Forbes 38-50.

reader or guest and takes her or him out of the logic of the mundane” and that “Clarissa does have control” (42, 43). Garvey likewise points to Mrs. Dalloway’s role as an artist, drawing upon the water imagery in Woolf’s novel. She writes that “Woolf employs water imagery to reveal differences within apparent unity, to undermine patriarchal institutions such as marriage, and ultimately to create a female vision of the cityscape” (Garvey 60). Expanding upon Littleton and Garvey’s claim, I examine Mrs. Dalloway’s artistic performance as she rehearses, directs, and envisions a new femininity of the twentieth century.

Since Woolf has been renowned for interrogating gender norms, it is no surprise that many critics have studied her works in this regard. However, little research on gender and performance has been applied to *The Great Gatsby*.<sup>8</sup> Meredith Goldsmith discusses the role of performance in constructing identity, yet associates Gatsby’s self-invention with the Harlem Renaissance and Americanization fiction (443). Barbara Will’s perspective may be the most useful in identifying the type of performance Gatsby showcases. Will highlights a sort of vanishing act by Gatsby, arguing that Fitzgerald challenges his “readers to question the terms through which ‘presence’ or ‘visibility’ can be signified” (126). While I agree that Gatsby is a mysterious presence, I would argue that this constitutes part of Gatsby’s staged performance and not as the “obscene” or “as the threatening figure of the alien” that Will contends (128).<sup>9</sup> While many have

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<sup>8</sup> Critics tend to read *The Great Gatsby* in terms of the American Dream, materialism, and Darwinism, but not gender performativity. See Vatanpour 71-87; Hawkins 49-68; Del Gizzo 69-94; Rule-Maxwell 57-78; Hilgart 87-116; and Saunders 138-174.

<sup>9</sup> The “obscene” that Will centers her argument around is the passage that appears in *The Great Gatsby*, “On the white steps an obscene word, scrawled by some boy with a piece of brick, stood out clearly in the moonlight and I erased it, drawing my shoe raspily along the stone” (Fitzgerald 1999, 140). See Will 125-144 for a more detailed account.



examined gender performance extensively in *Mrs. Dalloway*, little research has investigated the ambiguity surrounding Gatsby's masculinity.

In *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Great Gatsby*, Woolf and Fitzgerald extend the idea of tradition, imagination, and gender reappraisal to the fictional page. In post-war Britain and America, Butler's theory of performativity emphasizes both actress and actor in Westminster and West Egg societies, respectfully. While Mrs. Dalloway's performance is marked as sophisticated and classy, Gatsby represents a magician and romantic wanderer whose performance is unorganized and haphazard. The spotlight shines brightly upon them as they also represent the role of stage directors in charge of elaborate parties. As directors, every minute detail matters, especially the trivial. Ultimately, the minute connects to larger social and political issues. Memory becomes crucial in redefining gender identities in the present. For Mrs. Dalloway and Gatsby, the British Empire and American nation now rest in their hands as they must exploit both the duties of actress/actor and director to tease new gender identities of the modern age; that is, pointing to foreseeable change on the horizon. The arrival of death marks not the end, but rather, a new beginning. Woolf demonstrates that Septimus's death prompts Mrs. Dalloway to persevere in a new, imagined feminine role which caters solely to her freedom as a woman. Similarly, Fitzgerald highlights that Gatsby's death impels Nick to attempt an escape from the corruption of consumer culture. While neither Mrs. Dalloway or Gatsby achieve non-heteronormative identities outside marriage or capitalism, Woolf

and Fitzgerald playfully tap into an expanded vision of staged possibilities beyond the “gilded cage.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The phrase “gilded cage” appears in the song “Limelight” by Canadian rock band Rush, where Geddy Lee sings at the end of the first verse, “Beyond the gilded cage.” In my paper it is used to refer to an entrapment within a materialistic and modernist culture.

## CHAPTER II

### THE ACTRESS OF WESTMINSTER AND THE ACTOR OF WEST EGG

In *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Great Gatsby*, Woolf and Fitzgerald depict protagonists who craft their surroundings into a staged show. In an interview with Liz Kotz, Butler asserts that “Performativity has to do with repetition, very often the repetition of oppressive and painful gender norms . . . This is not freedom, but a question of how to work the trap that one is inevitably in” (Kotz). Sarah Salih highlights Butler’s notions of gender performativity, noting that “gender is not something one *is*, it is something one *does*, an act, or more precisely, a sequence of acts, a verb rather than a noun, a ‘doing’ rather than a ‘being’” (55). Hence, in elite Britain and America, performance belies the repetition and rituals of *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Gatsby*. Though *Mrs. Dalloway* is well aware of her performative accomplishment, *Gatsby* is not. Yet, as a whole, the novels reflect Woolf and Fitzgerald’s discontent with modern society. While Woolf aimed “to criticize the social system,” Fitzgerald sought to open “the door on a dark chamber of American life” (Bell vol 2: 99; Brown 284-285). Projecting such radical political views into their works, Woolf and Fitzgerald present a well-crafted stage to observe imaginative individuals subtly undermining twentieth century gender norms.

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, the novel begins with Mrs. Dalloway already acting and in motion. Woolf writes, “Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself” (3). In upper Westminster, acting is a necessity. As an actress, Mrs. Dalloway defines many roles—wife, mother, and friend. But above all, Mrs. Dalloway is an illuminating hostess in elite society. Woolf suggests that the spotlight shines upon her protagonist since appearances mean everything. For instance, when talking to Hugh Whitbread, Mrs. Dalloway “felt very sisterly and oddly conscious at the same time of her hat” while thinking that it was “Not the right hat for the early morning, was that it?” (6). As her role as an actress, she must entertain. She *lives* to entertain since performance allows her to detach herself from patriarchal misconceptions of “a girl of eighteen” (6). For instance, Scope Purvis observes that Mrs. Dalloway had “a touch of the bird about her, of the jay, blue-green, light, vivacious” (4).<sup>11</sup> Since “Scope” could refer to a telescope or microscope, Woolf emphasizes that everything Mrs. Dalloway does as a performer is closely examined, analyzed, and magnified. Woolf showcases that Mrs. Dalloway plays her part to the fullest. When looking into the book shop window, Woolf describes how much Mrs. Dalloway “wanted it—that people should look pleased as she came in” and that “it was silly to have other reasons for doing things” (10). Later, upon seeing her daughter, she dramatically proclaims, “Here is my Elizabeth” (48). Hence, Woolf demonstrates that Mrs. Dalloway’s role as a stage actress matters in post-war Britain. Littleton asserts that “Clarissa passes the rest of the characters by turning the love of existence into an existential starting point” (38). As she walks down Bond Street, Woolf

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<sup>11</sup> Similar to her protagonist, Bell documents that Woolf, “reminded one of some fantastical bird, abruptly throwing her head and crowing with delighted amusement at some idea, some word, some paradox, that took her fancy” (vol. 2: 96).

highlights the key elements that comprise Mrs. Dalloway's stage from "a beating, a stirring of galloping ponies, tapping of cricket bats" to "discreet old dowagers [who] were shooting out in their motor cars on errands of mystery" (5). Shannon Forbes argues that "London validates and celebrates Clarissa's choice of performing the role of the perfect hostess" (40). In a world of rising modernity, Woolf emphasizes a woman teasing a new feminine role.

Through her repeated insertion of the word "plunge," Woolf further exemplifies Mrs. Dalloway's stage presence as she readily dives into her role as an actress. Because an actress requires continuous motion and repetition, Mrs. Dalloway theatrically frames each space as her own to ultimately discover a room of intimate possibilities. For instance, before entering her drawing room, she feels "an exquisite suspense" prior to "plunging while the sea darkens and brightens beneath him, and the waves threaten to break, but only gently split their surface, roll and conceal and encrust as they just turn over the weeds with pearl" (30). Garvey maintains that "The recurrent imagery—particularly that related to water—reinforces the impression that everything is running together, that consciousness and city are becoming indistinguishable" (60). Being theatrical is all part of Mrs. Dalloway's act since to act the part, she must look the part. Wearing the precise dress determines her gender aesthetic in post-war Britain. Hence, she picks "a favourite dress, one of Sally Parker's, the last she ever made" (39). Woolf reinserts the word "plunge" when Mrs. Dalloway prepares for her party. She describes Mrs. Dalloway as plunging "into the heart of the moment" as she views "the glass, the dressing-table, and all the bottles afresh, collecting the whole of her at one point (as she looked into the glass)...the woman who was to give her party; of Clarissa Dalloway; of

herself" (37). Shortly after, Mrs. Dalloway must mend her dress, so begins "plunging her hand into the softness" (37). The mending of the green dress symbolizes Mrs. Dalloway's desire to thrive in the limelight. Woolf's continuous use of "plunge" underlies Butler's notion of gender construction through repetitive acts which demonstrates "a performative accomplishment" that "the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief." Hence, Woolf underscores the quick and spontaneous persona Mrs. Dalloway must assume in this new, fast-paced world of modernity.

Woolf suggests that Big Ben plays a defining part in Mrs. Dalloway's will to entertain, emphasizing that her life requires constant acting, practicing, and repeating. Throughout the novel, Big Ben continually resonates on Mrs. Dalloway's stage. When traveling through London, Woolf demonstrates how her protagonist's demeanor shifts when the clock strikes. Woolf writes that "There! Out it boomed. First a warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable. The leaden circles dissolved in the air" (4). "Warning" and "irrevocable" bespeak of the authority Big Ben carries. Woolf notes that "The sound of Big Ben flooded Clarissa's drawing room" and later how "the clock went on striking" (117, 150). The looming presence of Big Ben denotes an antagonist to Mrs. Dalloway's role as actress. For instance, when Peter interrupts Mrs. Dalloway's behind-the-scene preparation, Big Ben strikes again. Woolf describes that "The sound of Big Ben striking the half-hour stuck out between them with extraordinary vigour, as if a young man, strong, independent, inconsiderate, were swinging dumb-bells this way and that" (48). Big Ben portrayed as a "strong" man symbolizes the patriarchal world Mrs. Dalloway must combat against. Although Big Ben challenges Mrs. Dalloway's role,

Woolf illustrates that time only intensifies her need to perform. After the clock strikes, it is Peter who slinks away, while Mrs. Dalloway shouts for him to “Remember my party to-night!” (48). Similarly, Woolf reveals how Big Ben oversees the London stage that Mrs. Dalloway crafts, writing that “It was precisely twelve o’clock; twelve by Big Ben; whose stroke was wafted over the northern part of London; blent with that of other clocks...twelve o’clock struck as Clarissa Dalloway laid her green dress on her bed” (94). Though limiting, time ironically impels Mrs. Dalloway to fulfill her role as actress.<sup>12</sup> Jeanette McVicker asserts that Mrs. Dalloway “is giving a party at a certain time; she must run errands, fix her evening dress, see that the silver is polished, have tea, etc. Clarissa lives her day according to the punctuality of Big Ben” (181). Likewise, Forbes correctly notes that “every time Clarissa hears Big Ben she is reminded that the city validates and celebrates her decision to perform her chosen role” (42). Hence, Woolf reveals how the element of time reinforces Mrs. Dalloway’s role as a stage performer.

Mrs. Dalloway’s performance allows her to improvise in social situations and embrace the moment. Annalee Edmonson contends that Mrs. Dalloway “is a model of openness to being affected by others” and that “she both desires to know others and creates inner lives by opening out narratives” (26). Performance attaches her to Britain’s most powerful women such as Lady Bexborough and the Queen. For instance, after trying to recover a period of her life in the shop window, she immediately thinks of Lady Bexborough. Woolf writes that, “Think, for example, of the woman she admired most, Lady Bexborough” and that “She would have been, in the first place, dark like Lady

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<sup>12</sup> Similar to Mrs. Dalloway, Bell notes that Woolf desired “to see events out of time, to apprehend processes of thought and feeling as though they were pictorial shapes” (vol. 2, 107).

Bexborough, with a skin of crumpled leather and beautiful eyes. She would have been, like Lady Bexborough, slow and stately; rather large; interested in politics like a man; with a country house; very dignified, very sincere” (10). As Mrs. Dalloway admires Lady Bexborough, she rehearses an image of a woman who is “stately” and “very dignified.” Not merely restricted to the local domain, Mrs. Dalloway’s performance begins branching into social and political notions surrounding women. As the motor car passes Mrs. Dalloway, she imagines herself the Queen of England when she believes “It is probably the Queen” with Woolf noting that “for a second she wore a look of extreme dignity, standing by the flower shop in the sunlight while the car passed at a foot’s pace, with its blind’s drawn. The Queen going to the hospital; the Queen opening some bazaar, thought Clarissa” (16, 17). Similar to Mrs. Dalloway acting out Lady Bexborough’s role in the public sphere, she also role plays the Queen. By imagining the destination of the motor car, Mrs. Dalloway slowly begins finding her voice in the British nation. Later on, when Peter interrupts Mrs. Dalloway in her dressing room, she again assumes the role of a Queen demanding authority. Taking her needle, Woolf writes that she was “summoned, like a Queen whose guards have fallen sleep and left her unprotected...summoned to her help the things she did; the things she liked; her husband; Elizabeth; her self, in short, which Peter hardly knew now, all to come about her and beat off the enemy” (44). Danbee Moon asserts that “Peter selfishly attempts to break Clarissa down into fragments and pieces that he can understand and take in through his scrutinizing male gaze” (257). Although Peter attempts to hinder her confidence as a woman, Woolf suggests that Mrs. Dalloway’s role as an actress allows her to triumph.



Mrs. Dalloway's memories at Bourton serve as another platform for her to perform her femininity. Using the tools of the stage, Mrs. Dalloway gravitates towards a feminine role catered towards the public sphere with larger political stakes. Her memories represent the freedom from domestic responsibility and an escape from the constraints placed upon twentieth century women. Woolf alludes sporadically to nostalgic images of British culture across the social spectrum in Mrs. Dalloway's walk down Bond Street. On her journey, Mrs. Dalloway wonders "But what was she dreaming as she looked into Hatchards' shop window? What was she trying to recover?" (9). Later she asks, "And what had she made of it [her life]? What, indeed?" (43). While Mrs. Dalloway recollects many instances at Bourton, it is Sally Seton's presence that offers an altered vision of liberation beyond the scope of domesticity.<sup>13</sup> Kate Haffey maintains that "nothing cuts across time with quite the same intensity as her memories of Sally Seton" (145). Mrs. Dalloway recalls Sally's outfit in "pink gauze" while "she *seemed*, anyhow, all light, glowing, like some bird or air ball that has flown in, attached itself for a moment to a bramble" (35). Like Lady Bexborough and the Queen, Mrs. Dalloway must integrate Sally's voice into her own femininity. Woolf depicts Sally as an atypical traditional woman since "she was completely reckless; did the most idiotic things out of bravado; bicycled round the parapet on the terrace; smoked cigars" and how Mrs. Dalloway felt that her "charm was overpowering" (34). Yet, the defining moment arises from one intimate moment—the kiss. Mrs. Dalloway remembers that "Sally stopped; picked a

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<sup>13</sup> Based on Bell's biography of Woolf, two female figures could have influenced Woolf's conception of Sally Seton. One may have been Madge Symonds who was described as a "romantic figure" and a "modern, adventurous, 'aesthetic'—very much a girl of the 'nineties, and this inevitably was attractive" (vol.1: 60). Another could have been Violet Dickinson who "had a breezy masculine assurance" and whom Woolf desired to love over men (vol.1: 83).

flower; kissed her on the lips. The whole world might have turned upside down! The others disappeared; there she was alone with Sally” (35). V. G. Julie Rajan notes that “When Clarissa is with Sally, she feels alive” (44). Here, in the past, the world momentarily “turns upside down” where women can enact their own notions of femininity. Garvey argues that the past “provides a marker, a touchstone of sorts, or a ‘lighthouse’ whose beacon guides the voyager” (71). While revisiting the past offers a world of tradition, it also offers an early framework of female empowerment and friendship—a subtle nudge towards renovating gender norms. Through Sally, Woolf reveals a radical voice that demands to be heard in a post-war patriarchal society.

Mrs. Dalloway also acts out another defining character inspired by the old woman across from her house. After Miss Kilman leaves, Mrs. Dalloway rehearses the role of the old woman, who symbolizes a simple life unobstructed by love and religion. Mrs. Dalloway observes:

the old lady opposite climbing upstairs. Let her climb upstairs if she wanted to; let her stop; then let her, as Clarissa had often seen her, gain her bedroom, part her curtains, and disappear again into the background. Somehow one respected that—that old woman looking out of the window, quite unconscious that she was being watched (126).

The old lady symbolizes Mrs. Dalloway’s ability to rehearse and revise her role as a modern woman. By rehearse, I mean, Mrs. Dalloway’s endeavors to begin preparing her femininity for the modern stage, or a public sphere dominated by men. Christina Stevenson terms Mrs. Dalloway’s “rehearsal,” as using “the room to rehearse the identity of the woman she is supposed to be” and that it acts as “a space in which an individual is

assembled, ‘contracted,’ and identified, Clarissa’s bedroom houses the fantasy of a self-contained, stable identity” (125). Likewise, Caroline Webb appropriately notes that “The old woman’s life remains her own, yet her separation reflects, and thereby in a sense creates, Clarissa’s own identity” (285). By focusing on the room of another woman, Woolf outlines the central features that comprise a woman’s space while also suggesting that the scene allows Mrs. Dalloway to progress towards a forgotten, but not entirely minute role—Clarissa Dalloway.



In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald similarly highlights how his protagonist, Jay Gatsby, relies on performance, and as a result, stands apart from Tom Buchanan, George Wilson, and even Nick Carraway.<sup>14</sup> Saunders describes Tom as possessing “a muscular build and a dominant personality, buttressed by an aggressively masculine glamour lingering from his college football days” while acknowledging his infidelity with women “illustrates the ‘relaxed standards’ men typically apply in short-term involvements” (139, 140). Whereas Tom argues backwards thinking of society, claiming, “It’s up to us, who are the dominant race, to watch out or these other races will have control of things,” George resides in the valley of ashes nearly forgotten and unimpressible (13). Meanwhile, Nick, a novice, tries to absorb every role Gatsby has to offer. Fitzgerald points to the qualities of Trimalchio embedded in Gatsby’s role as a performer. Because Gatsby was born a poor-level farmer, he must continually prove his status to West and East Egg societies of Long Island, New York. Fitzgerald emphasizes through a novel

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<sup>14</sup> Brown notes that Charles Garfield King, who was against Fitzgerald marrying his daughter, Ginevra, shows a strong resemblance to Tom Buchanan (62).

revolving around Roaring Twenties America that his characters will put on any staged performance in order to rise in elite society. Suzanne Del Gizzo outlines that “Jay Gatsby lives in a world where nothing is simply what it is” (84). Similarly, Sina Vatanpour argues that “Vanity, ostentatious display of wealth, and play-acting are the rules of the games” (86). Gatsby is full participant in this game. Similar to Trimalchio, Gatsby represents a rags-to-riches story and becomes West Egg’s “greatest King.” Everyone bows to his performance, even the authorities. For instance, when pulled over by a police officer, Nick observes that Gatsby removed “a white card from his wallet” and “waved it before the man’s eyes” (68). As a result, the police officer apologetically states, “Know you next time, Mr. Gatsby. Excuse *me!*” (68). With a new role as Trimalchio, anything goes; anything can happen. In order to be at the top of his game, Gatsby must be clever and always think on his toes. Hanging with Meyer Wolfsheim teaches Gatsby the ropes of manipulating the system. When Nick wonders why Wolfsheim is not in jail after fixing the World Series of 1919, Gatsby simply answers, “They can’t get him, old sport. He’s a smart man” (73). Unique, highly trained, and quick-witted, Fitzgerald highlights that Gatsby’s performance points to a masculinity deeply embedded in capitalism.

While Gatsby adheres by the rules of capitalism, Fitzgerald emphasizes that the past comprises an ocean of possibilities that expand beyond societal norms. In a memory documented by Nick, he notes Gatsby’s ascent from a poor-level farmer to a man with larger social and political ambitions, writing that “To young Gatz, resting on his oars and looking up at the railed deck, that yacht represented all the beauty and glamour in the world” and that “when the *Tuolomee* left for the West Indies and the Barbary Coast

Gatsby left too” (100). In this specific moment, Gatsby is an adventurer of new ideas. By narrowing in on this detailed moment of the past, Fitzgerald subtly points to excitement and thrill as part of Gatsby’s stage act. Like an explorer, Gatsby seeks to venture beyond societal gender norms and reinsert his own impression of life surrounding him as Nick observes that Gatsby “stretched out his arms toward the dark water in a curious way” while distinguishing “nothing except a single green light, minute and far away, that might have been the end of a dock” (21). Similar to Mrs. Dalloway’s flower errand, Gatsby is on a quest for the precise flower—Daisy Buchanan, a member of East Egg. In order to aid in his quest, Gatsby rehearses the qualities of a magician—most particularly, the ability to vanish in the blink of an eye. Through vanishing acts, Fitzgerald reveals Gatsby’s economic rise while also depicting a unique masculinity. Will contends that “Gatsby is nowhere and everywhere, a ‘vanishing presence’” (129). Fittingly, Gatsby’s first appearance is fleeting and momentary. When Nick glances at his neighbor, then seaward, he notes that “When I looked once more for Gatsby he had vanished, and I was alone again in the unquiet darkness” (21). Similarly, when Nick turns to speak to Gatsby at the diner, he shockingly discovers that “he was no longer there” (74). Thus, Fitzgerald suggests that Gatsby, as well as his past, remain shrouded in mystery, as Nick posits “Where is he from, I mean? And what does he do? (49). Whereas Mrs. Dalloway repeatedly plunges into her duties, Gatsby relies on vanishing acts to stage and restage a masculine identity, or as Butler asserts, “to work the trap” he is in. Nick documents how “The truth was that Jay Gatsby of West Egg, Long Island, sprang from a Platonic conception of himself...to this conception he was faithful to the end” (98). What his audience perceives is an Oxford man who interweaves “old sport”

into his act. Gatsby explains to Nick, “I was brought up in America but educated at Oxford, because all my ancestors have been educated there for many years. It is a family tradition” (65). Hence, Fitzgerald’s narration illustrates that Gatsby’s ambiguous and suspenseful performance keeps his audience wanting more.

Fitzgerald highlights that Gatsby’s vanishing acts also occur at his Saturday night parties. When Nick attends Gatsby’s party, he speaks to a man, unaware that it is really Gatsby himself. He tells Gatsby, “This is an unusual party for me. I haven’t even seen the host” and that “this man Gatsby sent over his chauffeur with an invitation” (47). Gatsby’s vanishing acts allow him to gain social acceptance with fashionable “old money,” including Daisy. The fast-paced environment influences Gatsby to move and act swiftly to attract an audience as he rehearses and toys with a new masculinity. Salih points out that “Gender does not happen once and for all when we are born, but is a sequence of repeated acts that harden into the appearance that has been there all along” (58). For a convincing performance, Gatsby must abandon his life of James Gatz and openly accept his role as Trimalchio. Gatsby’s Saturday night parties reinforce a masculinity of magic and wonder. For instance, at one of the parties, Fitzgerald zooms the camera lens on Gatsby’s smile where Nick observes how it:

was one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it, that you may come across four or five times in life. It faced—or seemed to face—the whole external world for an instant, and then concentrated on *you*, with an irresistible prejudice in your favor. It understood you just as far as it wanted to be understood, believed in you as you would like to believe in yourself, and assured you that it had precisely the impression of

you that, at your best, you hoped to convey. Precisely at that point it vanished—and I was looking at an elegant young roughneck, a year or two over thirty, whose elaborate formality of speech just missed being absurd (48).

Fitzgerald, consequently, illustrates the role of performance in blending into elite society. Through Gatsby's "rare smile," Fitzgerald suggests that appearances and performances define social identity. Goldsmith argues that "Gatsby's smile enables him to elicit trust, facilitating his economic rise" and that "Gatsby appears less as a man than as something of an event (something that could 'happen')" (450, 446). Gatsby's act parallels the books in his library. As the man with the owl eyes scrutinizes over the books, he tells Nick and Jordan, "But what do you want? What do you expect?" (46). Will notes that "the 'realness' of the books signifies presence and meaning; yet their uncut pages underscore the opacity of the text-that-would-be-read" and that "Gatsby, too, is both 'really' there and absent, a figure who resists being perceived even by those with 'corrected' vision, who voids the signifying process of its meaningful end" (131). Thus, acting allows Gatsby to gratify elite society with an "eternal reassurance" and "an irresistible prejudice." While enchanting and totally irresistible, Fitzgerald highlights that Gatsby's formality of speech "just missed being absurd." Accordingly, Gatsby, while he desires to please, occupies on another level of gender performance.

Although Gatsby's act requires him to vanish in the American landscape, Fitzgerald draws upon Gatsby's enchanting persona and changing costumes to build upon the metaphor of a magician effectively reappearing. For instance, in Chapter IV, Nick notes that Gatsby pulled up in a "gorgeous car" which "lurched up the rocky drive to my door

and gave out a burst of melody from its three-noted horn” (63). Similar to Mrs. Dalloway, Gatsby *lives* for the spotlight and the ensuing applause.<sup>15</sup> While driving in Gatsby’s car, Nick hangs onto every word that Gatsby articulates regarding his time spent in WWI. Nick observes that “He lifted up the words and nodded at them—with his smile. The smile comprehended Montenegro’s troubled history and sympathized with the brave struggles of the Montenegrin people” and that “My incredulity was submerged in fascination now; it was like skimming hastily through a dozen magazines” (66). Once again Gatsby’s smile invites Nick into a performance of excitement and appeal. As an audience member, Nick tries to grasp the scope of Gatsby’s performance, but Fitzgerald suggests that this is not an easy feat since Gatsby continually sharpens his technique. Through Gatsby’s colorful wardrobe, Fitzgerald taps into a fictional realm where invention and creativity can prosper. Lauren Rule-Maxwell posits that “clothes function as the central symbol in this commentary to represent the role of objects in the fashioning American post-war identity” (71). When Gatsby drives up, Nick observes that in his “caramel-colored suit” Gatsby “was balancing himself on the dashboard of his car with that resourcefulness that is so peculiarly American” (64). Nick’s description of the “caramel-colored suit” signifies Gatsby’s ability to project his artistry onto the stage. Much like a tight-rope artist balancing on a wire, Gatsby’s act ensures that his audience remain mesmerized. Close attention to Gatsby’s costumes continues when Nick observes that Gatsby prepares to reunite with Daisy in “a white flannel suit, silver shirt, and gold-

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<sup>15</sup> Brown points out that Fitzgerald continued his critique of capitalism through his unfinished novel, *The Last Tycoon*, where the protagonist Pat Hobby believes that “to ‘exist’ means to be near the spotlight, the dollars, and the drama” (318).



colored tie” (84). Eccentric fashion becomes a stage act in and of itself. For example, Nick observes how:

he took out a pile of shirts and began throwing them, one by one, before us, shirts of sheer linen and thick silk and fine flannel...While we admired he brought more and the soft rich heap mounted higher—shirts with stripes and scrolls and plaids in coral and apple-green and lavender and faint orange, with monograms of Indian blue (92).

The colorful array of costumes showcases Gatsby’s desire to remain center stage. This scene underlies Butler’s assertion in an interview with Kotz that “becoming gendered involves impersonating an ideal that nobody actually inhabits” (Kotz). Similar to a magician pulling a rabbit out of his hat or colorful scarfs from his cuffs, Fitzgerald highlights that Gatsby’s array of costumes permit him to rehearse and revise his masculinity and, therefore, find individuality amongst a degrading capitalist world. Near the end of the novel, Tom suggests Gatsby’s eccentricity at fitting into old money, reasoning that “He wears a pink suit” (122). Gatsby’s costumes compare to Butler’s notion of drag and parody, as Salih writes that “Gender performances that do not try to conceal their genealogy, indeed, that go out of their way to accentuate it, displace heterocentric assumptions by revealing that heterosexual identities are as constructed and ‘unoriginal’ as the imitations of them” (58). Hence, Fitzgerald illustrates that Gatsby’s lavish costumes stress a need to rehearse a masculine identity centered on romanticism, fearlessness, and an eye-popping experience. In *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Great Gatsby*, Woolf and Fitzgerald highlight the role of actress and actor in repetitious and continuous motion. As a result, Mrs. Dalloway and Gatsby act out and perform elaborate, staged

performances which revive past dreams and, thus, present an alternative to twentieth century gender norms.

## CHAPTER III

### STAGE DIRECTORS OF AN ELABORATE SHOW

In addition to their role as actress/actor, Mrs. Dalloway and Gatsby are directors in post-war Britain and America. Tightly intertwined in their routines is the desire to enact a new role of femininity and masculinity. Woolf and Fitzgerald outline how the responsibility of director raises Mrs. Dalloway and Gatsby's gender performativity to new heights. In her novel, Woolf demonstrates that the role of director is unique, since it allows Mrs. Dalloway to feel a sense of excitement and responsibility outside the domestic sphere. Morris Philipson emphasizes that in this elite world, "a person is an event, a performance, an ongoing activity effectuating that existence through a rhythmic pattern of participation with and withdrawal from others" (138). Mrs. Dalloway needs to amaze and astound in order to captivate her audience. Thus, everything surrounding her is accentuated and requires constant supervision. As she stands atop the landing with her sewing utensils, Mrs. Dalloway resembles an admiral of a ship who "must also write, and see that things were generally in order" and how she hears, "the *swish* of the mop; tapping; knocking; a *loudness* when the front door opened; a *voice* repeating a message in the basement; the *chink* of a silver on a tray; clean silver for the party. All was for the party" (37-38, emphasis added). Every specific sound resonates with Mrs. Dalloway's

performance as director, thus, providing a reassurance that her role as a woman illuminates on the stage. Littleton argues that “she sees a way for her to act to strengthen collective being through her parties. Her parties are her art” and that “she feels a *need* for control of the party which indicates how much of her personality is involved in it” (42, 43). Small pieces constitute Mrs. Dalloway’s party as a whole. Woolf showcases Butler’s “stylized repetition of acts” when Mrs. Dalloway does not merely fixate on a crooked crystal dolphin, but also a “bald-looking cushion in the middle of the sofa” demanding Lucy to “Take it away! Give it to Mrs. Walker with my compliments! Take it away!” (38, 39). Later, Woolf emphasizes how food is scrutinized and brooded over while Mrs. Dalloway “would go over the dishes—the soup, the salmon; the salmon, Mrs. Walker knew, as usual underdone” (165). Even at the party, Mrs. Dalloway still has qualms about the entertainment, telling her guests, “I had meant to have dancing” (177). Ultimately, it is Mrs. Dalloway’s strict attention to the appropriate flower that allows for vibrancy in the party atmosphere while catering to women’s voice. Woolf describes how:

There were flowers delphiniums, sweet peas, bunches of lilac, and carnations, masses of carnations. There were roses; there were irises. And yes—so she breathed in the earthy garden sweet smell as she stood talking to Miss Pym...And then, opening her eyes, how fresh like frilled linen clean from a laundry laid in wicker trays the roses looked; and dark and prim the red carnations, holding their heads up; and all the sweet peas spreading in their bowls...every flower seems to burn by itself, softly, purely in the misty beds (13).

By focusing acutely on each flower, Woolf points to a new femininity apart from a male-dominated world. Flowers symbolize women's individuality as they "burn by itself, softly, purely in the misty beds." This scene in Miss Pym's shop parallels Mrs. Dalloway's memory of Sally at Bourton. Mrs. Dalloway recalls that "Sally's power was amazing, her gift, her personality. There was her way with flowers, for instance" since she "went out, picked hollyhocks, dahlias—all sorts of flowers that had never been seen together—cut their heads off, and made them swim on the top of water in bowls. The effect was extraordinary" (33, 34). Her memories of Sally symbolize the type of woman Mrs. Dalloway hopes she can replicate—confident, beautiful, and willing to challenge the patriarchal male. This dramatic presentation of flowers represents women in charge of their own destiny. Through Sally's removal of flower heads, Woolf points to a vision where women can abide (unattached) in the public sphere. Woolf's insertion of flowers in post-war Britain represents Mrs. Dalloway's endeavors to direct her own femininity towards radical change. Moon suggests that "Such flowers, strewn all over the novel, illuminate Clarissa's multitude of identities" (263). Thus, continual focus on the elements surrounding her, most particularly flowers, underscore Butler's contention of repetition and revision of performativity onto the stage.

Invitations provide another safeguard in Mrs. Dalloway's role as director. Because the uninvited could create chaos and disruption, Woolf reveals that Mrs. Dalloway will do everything in her power to govern who arrives and enters. For instance, when Peter Walsh barges into Mrs. Dalloway's dressing room, she thinks that "it was outrageous to be interrupted at eleven o'clock on the morning of the day she was giving a party" (40). Meticulous attention to the invitations allows for order, balance, and easy interactions

between guests in post-war Britain. When Ellie Henderson is not invited to Mrs. Dalloway's party, she wonders, "But why should she invite all the dull women in London to her parties? Why should Mrs. Marsham interfere?" and "if Mrs. Marsham gave a party, did *she* invite her guests?" (117, 119). Hence, Woolf illustrates that it is a privilege, not a right, to attend the party that Mrs. Dalloway is hosting. At this moment in time, her role as a woman holds value since at her parties "she felt quite continuously a sense of their existence; and she felt what a waste; and she felt what a pity; and she felt if only they could be brought together; so she did it" and that "it was an offering; to combine, to create" (122). Barrows argues that "Clarissa's social project to 'combine' and 'create' meaningful patterns of temporal organization across social divides arguably mirrors modernism's larger narrative project of forging alternative networks of temporal connection" (281). Similarly, Philipson notes that Mrs. Dalloway "is one of a couple, the member of a family, a friend to some, and ultimately a hostess to many: one who desires to bring together a number of different people" (130). Philipson goes on to explain that "*the self is a group and the image of individualization is a successful party*" (130). Invitations represent a bridge towards a new femininity defined by social and political opportunities.

As hostess, Mrs. Dalloway ensures that her guests are comfortable, catered to, and above all, given the most adamant attention. Everyone who is everyone is there. As each guest arrives their names are formerly announced, while Mrs. Barnet "would sit, in the cloakroom, patting down the furs, smoothing out the Spanish shawls, tidying the dressing table" (167). Woolf demonstrates that Mrs. Dalloway will act out and/or direct any elaborate feat in order to immerse herself in social conversation. Any disruptive topic of

debate must be overruled by the hostess. Therefore, when Mrs. Dalloway notices the ensuing argument between Professor Brierly and Jim Hutton, she interjects and maneuvers the conversation to the composer Johann Sabastian Bach since “that was the bond between them” and even compliments Brierly telling Hutton that “[Professor Brierly] knows everything in the whole world about Milton” (176, 177). To an extent, Woolf demonstrates that an unforgettable performance draws a crowd. Philipson argues that “Any party—a tea party or a cocktail party or a dinner party or a large ‘bash’ or a ball—is successful when a majority of the participants can each feel that, there, they are *at their best*” (131). Similarly, Forbes maintains that “The fascinating thing about Clarissa...is that she actually *does* seem to perform consistently in a way that confirms her identity as a perfect hostess” (49). Mrs. Dalloway’s parties serve as the locus of Westminster, the place for elite society to prosper. Peter Walsh notices that “it was her street, this, Clarissa’s; cabs were rushing round the corner, like water round the piers of a bridge, drawn together, it seemed to him because they bore people going to her party, Clarissa’s party” (164). As hostess, Mrs. Dalloway’s motivation centers on bringing together various individuals of upper Westminster. Yet, Woolf reveals the social accomplishment of such star-studded events to be providing a platform for women of modernity, tradition, and political aspirations. For instance, Ellie Henderson observes that “Girls wore straight frocks, perfectly tight, with skirts well above the ankles. It was not becoming she thought” (169). Woolf paints an image of modern women expressing their voice through a rebellious style against tradition. While old traditions may be outdated, Aunt Helena Parry was “not dead: Miss Parry was alive. She was past eighty. She ascended staircases slowly with a stick. She was placed in a chair” (178). Thus, the

past has not entirely been forgotten. Sally Seton's arrival reinforces Mrs. Dalloway's memories at Bourton as she hears, "That voice! It was Sally Seton! Sally Seton! after all these years! She loomed through a mist" (171). The party atmosphere of fashion, order, and etiquette suddenly takes a back seat to Sally's mystical, awe-inspired voice. "Loomed through a mist" represents Mrs. Dalloway's former identity of freedom about to collide with her present life of domesticity, remembering that Sally "had the simplest egotism, the most open desire to be thought first always, and Clarissa loved her for being like that" as she kindled "all over with pleasure at the thought of the past" (171-172). With Sally's presence, Woolf draws attention to equality for women looming on the horizon. Finally, Woolf outlines that women with political ideas can flourish. With the arrival of the Prime Minister, the party suddenly pauses where nobody looks but all the guests "knew, felt to the marrow of their bones, this majesty passing; this symbol of what they all stood for, English society" (172). Lady Bruton, a worldly female figure, has the opportunity to speak with the Prime Minister himself. Woolf writes that Lady Bruton "swam up, and they withdrew into a little room" and how afterwards she "wagged her fine old head. She was thanking him presumably for some piece of servility" (172, 173). Mrs. Dalloway's parties serve as a limited window for women to intermingle amongst patriarchal figures and find their voice in post-war society. Under her direction as hostess, Mrs. Dalloway must solidify feminine roles of tradition, modernity, and politics into one, concise entity—Clarissa Dalloway.

While Mrs. Dalloway's performance tailors to an elite group of women, it also allows her to express early visions of a new femininity. For instance, while walking in the upper level of her house, Mrs. Dalloway directs an image of herself where she could:



feel what men felt. Only for a moment; but it was enough. It was a sudden revelation, a tinge like a blush which one tried to check and then, as it spread, one yielded to its expansion, and rushed to the farthest verge and there quivered and felt the world come closer, swollen with some astonishing significance, some pressure of rapture, which split its thin skin and gushed and poured with an extraordinary alleviation over the cracks and the sores! Then, for that moment, she had seen an illumination; a match burning in a crocus; an inner meaning almost expressed (32).

Mrs. Dalloway's role as a performer allows her to visualize women blending into a modern culture dominated by men.<sup>16</sup> In this instant, Mrs. Dalloway rehearses Sally's presence of "bravado" into an understanding where women can think rationally in the public sphere or feel "what men felt." Woolf utilizes the metaphor of a blush to illustrate the major political change awaiting women as it "poured with an extraordinary alleviation over the cracks and the sores!" While significant, Woolf suggests that Mrs. Dalloway must continue repeating and revising her femininity since it is an "inner meaning *almost* expressed." Philipson contends that the crocus though "an object of *beauty*" is "combined with the thrill of a danger involved, the inherent destructive potential of fire. Thereby, the flower image is experienced as an event, a performance, not a useful means to an end other than itself but of use only as expressive of consummatory pleasure, an end in itself" (147). Thus, an old, forgotten role at Bourton soon relocates to center stage, threatening to burst beyond the realm of the past. At the party, the "birds of Paradise"

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<sup>16</sup> Through Mrs. Dalloway, Woolf projects her own vast imagination that was "furnished with an accelerator and no brakes" (Bell vol 1: 148).

represent women's femininity fringing on the borders of the public sphere. While standing for the success of her party, it also marks women's advance into new realms. Woolf writes that "The curtain with its flight of birds of Paradise blew out again. And Clarissa saw—she saw Ralph Lyon beat it back, and go on talking" (170). Hence, Woolf suggests that women must fight to stay relevant in a patriarchal society. Although these visions appear briefly, Woolf reveals a woman carefully directing her femininity into a cohesive whole that includes a dreamy past, modern politics, and an old woman in a window. Every element of the party must be planned and timed in order for Mrs. Dalloway to feel a sense of self-worth and to "kindle and illuminate," as she recognizes that "she made this happen, that it marked a *stage*" (5, 170, emphasis added). Thus, Woolf denotes that the performative role of Mrs. Dalloway allows for a standing ovation but, most importantly, posits a new creative space for women in a collapsing British Empire.



Similar to Woolf, Fitzgerald conveys how the role of director incorporates a romantic dream into a post-war society. Directing and hosting elaborate parties become Gatsby's way of living and breathing American values and presenting a "Prohibition defying party" (Brown 303). Ty Hawkins highlights that "Gatsby is a man who creates order in disorder. To be sure, Gatsby does carry about him the cloak of the romantic—the cloak, more or less of an aesthete" (52). At the beginning of Chapter III, Nick notes the extravagant manners of his neighbor:

There was music from my neighbor's house through the summer nights.  
In his blue gardens men and girls came and went like moths among the

whisperings and the champagne and the stars. At high tide in the afternoon I watched his guest diving from the tower of his raft, or taking the sun on the hot sand of his beach while his two motor-boats slit the waters of the Sound, drawing aquaplanes over cataracts of foam. On week-ends his Rolls-Royce became an omnibus, bearing parties to and from the city between nine in the morning and long past midnight, while his station wagon scampered like a brisk yellow bug to meet all trains (39).

As a result, Gatsby's doors are open to anyone who shows up. Like a democracy, Gatsby caters and provides equal footing to his guests where they can "glide on through the sea-change of faces and voices and color under the constantly changing light" (41).

Entertainment value and attraction take precedence over social etiquette. Fitzgerald demonstrates that his anti-hero will perform any feat for the chance to rise in West Egg, New York. John Hilgart points out that "Gatsby's parties serve as a locus for libidinal energies writ large" (97). Thus, focus on minute detail is crucial to the outcome of a successful party. Gatsby's duty as stage director begins when Nick notices that "Every Friday five crates of oranges and lemons arrived from a fruiter in New York" while every two weeks "a corps of caterers came down with several hundred feet of canvas and enough colored lights to make a Christmas tree of Gatsby's enormous garden" (39, 40). In addition, buffet tables are endowed with "glistening hors d'oeuvre, spiced baked hams crowded against salads of harlequin designs and pastry pigs and turkeys bewitched to a dark gold" (40). Finally, guests are welcomed to an orchestra of a "no thin five-piece affair" (40). It is only after one of the gypsies begins dancing to the music that Nick

notes, “The party has begun” (41). Small pieces are carefully and strategically arranged. Hawkins argues that “Gatsby asks for his entitlement, entrance into the ‘secret society.’ Gatsby’s desire is not simple greed, then; he wishes only for what the Dream has promised, that for which he has worked for in spectacular fashion” (54-55). Attention to minute detail prepares Gatsby for potential change, while cementing his social role as Trimalchio.

Fitzgerald also reveals that the celebrity status of guests accentuates Gatsby’s role as stage director.<sup>17</sup> When Daisy wonders how Gatsby lives in such a big house by himself, he informs her that “I keep it always full of interesting people, night and day. People who do interesting things. Celebrated people” (90). “I keep it always full of interesting people” denotes a collector of accumulated social capital and ownership. Fitzgerald’s insertion of celebrities suggest that Gatsby’s parties are more elaborate than a “little party” as Nick claims (41). Instead, Gatsby’s parties are an event, where everyone flocks or at least acknowledges, the gravitational pull surrounding Gatsby’s mansion. This may explain why Jordan Baker tells Nick “You must know Gatsby” while Myrtle’s sister, Catherine, informs Nick, “I was down there at a party about a month ago. At a man named Gatsby’s. Do you know him?” (11, 32). Nick even lists prominent names such as Doctor Webster Civet from East Egg, and West Egg members such as the Poles, Clyde Cohen, and Arthur McCarthy who were “all connected with the movies in one way or another” (62). Similar to Mrs. Dalloway, Gatsby’s identity comprises what Del Gizzo believes “is created entirely by such performances and markers of status” (90).

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<sup>17</sup> Like Gatsby, Fitzgerald and his wife, Zelda, inserted themselves into celebrity culture “as though they were auditioning in the papers for the roles of Mr. and Mrs. Jazz Age” and that both were “legend makers of a kind who were eventually consumed by the intensity of their celebrity” (Brown 78, 79).

Tom's domineering presence proves no match, for when he and Daisy arrive to one of Gatsby's parties, Gatsby is ready to perform. Gatsby draws their attention to an actress and director, informing them that "Perhaps you know that lady" as he points toward an actress of a "gorgeous, scarcely human orchid of a woman" (104). Shortly after, he tells them, "The man bending over her is her director" (105). Daisy is amazed and stunned, exclaiming, "I've never met so many celebrities" (105). Tom, too, is also distracted, asking Daisy, "Do you mind if I eat with some people over here?" (105). While classified as old money, Daisy cannot hide the intrigue and excitement surrounding Gatsby's performance. Rule-Maxwell argues that, through Gatsby, Fitzgerald seeks to "present Americans with a more accurate picture of the new ways in which they fashion themselves and of how that style projects, for better or worse, a national character" (68). Although not as sophisticated and classy as Mrs. Dalloway's party, Gatsby's parties denote a need to direct his masculinity amongst a distinguished celebrity status.

As director, Gatsby must ensure that his house dazzles his audience, but most importantly, Daisy Buchanan, his entrance into East Egg. While Gatsby's social impact necessitates impressing anyone who walks through his doors, his personal aim includes winning Daisy's love.<sup>18</sup> Vatanpour maintains that "The name Daisy brings to mind a flower with white petals and a golden center which grows amidst the green grass in spring; its etymology—day's eye—evokes the sun and its golden rays" (75). Daisy is in awe of Gatsby's wealth and mansion, asking "That huge place *there*?" and later intrigued by "The pompadour! You never told me you had a pompadour—or a yacht" (90, 93).

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<sup>18</sup> Fitzgerald's relationship with Ginevra King may have influenced his depiction of Daisy. Brown highlights that Ginevra faced "marital disenchantment" which "serves as a prologue to Daisy's brief affair with Gatsby" (64).

Saunders notes that “As the ‘circus master’ and the ‘carnivaliser of reality,’ he attempts to infuse his newly acquired wealth with magical potential and thus render it even more attractive” while “utilizing typically show-and-tell tactics” (154, 153). Gatsby’s grand tour of his mansion allows him to direct his environment while flaunting his masculinity in Daisy’s eyes. Although Gatsby’s role is rooted in capitalism, Fitzgerald’s insertion of flowers accentuates his protagonist’s romanticism in securing Daisy. When Gatsby welcomes Nick and Daisy on a tour of his mansion, Nick observes that “Instead of taking the short cut along the Sound we went down the road and entered by the big postern” and how Daisy “admired the gardens, the sparkling odor of jonquils and the frothy odor of hawthorn and plum blossoms and the pale gold odor of kiss-me-at-the-gate” (90). Even Gatsby’s bedrooms are “vivid with new flowers” (91). Similar to Mrs. Dalloway’s encounter with flowers “burning” by themselves, flowers of Gatsby’s mansion reveal a vivacious style and taste of the twentieth century. Saunders writes that Gatsby “will burst into her life with glorious suddenness, an ideally re-invented version of a man she already has found worthy of love” (153). Likewise, Dubose argues that “Gatsby’s love for Daisy springs from an ancient concept of chivalry—the love of a soldier or knight for his golden girl or fair lady” (77). Similar to Woolf, Fitzgerald stresses a need to reexamine and expand beyond societal gender norms. Through a romantic wanderer, Fitzgerald points to a man seeking to repeat and revise an aura of “ripe mystery” and of romances that were “fresh and breathing and redolent of this year’s shining motor-cars and of dances whose flowers were scarcely withered” (148-149). Gatsby’s attention to flowers in post-war America highlights Butler’s contention that “the action of gender requires a performance that is *repeated*. This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing

of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation” (Butler 191). Through Gatsby’s roles as a romantic adventurer and a magician, Fitzgerald presents alternative models of masculinity surrounded by color, grandeur, and elaborate costumes.

While Gatsby is very much a capitalist, Fitzgerald subtly undermines such a belief system as short lived and unreflective of the artist.<sup>19</sup> Fitzgerald draws upon Gatsby’s identity of capitalist and romantic/magician to illustrate the social divide between creative talent and the rising consumer culture in the 1920s. Instead of enhancing Gatsby’s role and winning Daisy’s heart, Fitzgerald suggests that capitalism diminishes individual voice. Nick observes that “a sudden emptiness seemed to flow now from the windows and the great doors, endowing with complete isolation the figure of the host, who stood on the porch, his hand up in a formal gesture of farewell” (55). Hence, Fitzgerald warns that dependence on consumer culture can lead to loneliness and dissatisfaction. Alternatively, Fitzgerald inserts spontaneous creative revelations that conflict with capitalistic views. For instance, when Nick returns home he fears that his house is on fire, documenting, “Two-o’clock and the whole corner of the peninsula was blazing with light, which fell unreal on the shrubbery and made thin elongating glints upon the roadside wires. Turning a corner, I saw it was Gatsby’s house, lit from tower to cellar” (81). “Blazing with light” illustrates the intensity of a scene that Nick cannot ignore since Gatsby’s house shines for all to see. Similar to Gatsby’s colorful costumes, the bright lights symbolize a spiritual renewal and purity of the past that held “a promise

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<sup>19</sup> Brown notes that “Like Gatsby, Scott, regarded money as a means to greater emotional ends rather than an end in itself” (44).

that the rock of the world was founded securely on a fairy's wing" (99). Though Gatsby tries to adapt a capitalist belief system, at the same time, his romantic visions of a distant past conflict with a society filled with dust and decay. Early on, Nick observes "a change in Gatsby that was simply confounding. He literally glowed; without a word or a gesture of exultation a new well-being radiated from him and filled the little room" and that he was "like an ecstatic patron of recurrent light" (89). At this moment, Nick is filled with wonder and awe. Drawing on "glowed" and "radiated," Fitzgerald hints at "a new well-being" centered on romanticism and mysticism that has the potential to progress towards political change. Fitzgerald outlines how Gatsby, similar to Mrs. Dalloway, must redirect the role of romantic wanderer into a progressive identity apart from a capitalist regime. Nick, a novice performer, draws on a romantic past when he notes "a wafer of moon" that "was shining over Gatsby's house, making the night fine as before, and surviving the laughter and the sound of his still glowing garden" (55). Fitzgerald's insertion of the "wafer of moon" which was "surviving the laughter" points to a romantic vision of masculinity independent of class and material worth. Through Mrs. Dalloway and Gatsby, Woolf and Fitzgerald critique gender norms of the twentieth century. Mrs. Dalloway and Gatsby's role as directors demonstrate Butler's notion that gender is "a *corporeal style*, an 'act,' as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where 'performative' suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning" (Butler 190). In their depiction of stage directors, Woolf and Fitzgerald accentuate the need to repeat and revise femininity and masculinity in post-war Britain and America.



## CHAPTER IV

### REAPPRAISALS OF POST-WAR FEMININITY AND MASCULINITY

As staged performers, Mrs. Dalloway and Gatsby repeat and revise specific gender roles onto the stage. Ultimately the presence of death ushers in reappraisals of femininity and masculinity in post-war societies. From a kiss at Bourton, to powerful women ruling the political arena, to even an old woman in a window, Woolf demonstrates that Mrs. Dalloway must incorporate visions of femininity from all spectrums of society. Through Mrs. Dalloway's performance as an actress and director, Woolf alludes to a woman progressing towards a political voice in the British Empire. After the motor car passes, Mrs. Dalloway:

had seen something white, magical, circular, in the footman's hand, a disc inscribed with a name,—the Queen's, the Prince of Wales, the Prime Minister's? —which, by force of its own lustre, burnt its way through...to blaze among candelabras, glittering stars, breasts stiff with oak leaves, Hugh Whitbread and all his colleagues, the gentlemen of England, that night in Buckingham Palace. And Clarissa, too, gave a party (17).

While Mrs. Dalloway's performance may seem over-the-top, Woolf presents a fictional world where women have the ability to transcend larger social and political stakes. By

listing royal names such as the Queen, the Prince of Wales, and the Prime Minister then writing “And Clarissa, too, gave a party,” Woolf associates Mrs. Dalloway’s parties with galas that go well beyond mere social events of Westminster. Hence, her role integrates political elements surrounding Britain including “something white, magical, circular, a disc inscribed with a name” while permitting her to rise amongst “the gentlemen of England.”

Many big names attend Mrs. Dalloway’s party, but it is the arrival of the Prime Minister that marks the height of her performance. Though representing the symbol of the British Empire, Woolf portrays him as looking “so ordinary” who “might have stood behind a counter and bought biscuits” (172). As a result, Woolf critiques a British Empire of patriarchal figures, suggesting a revision of women’s role in social and political issues. Similar to the mystery of the motor car, Mrs. Dalloway dazzles and shines as she welcomes the Prime Minister. Woolf writes that:

And now Clarissa escorted her Prime Minister down the room, prancing, sparkling, with the stateliness of her grey hair. She wore ear-rings, and a silver-green mermaid’s dress. *Lolloping* on the waves and braiding her tresses she seemed, having that gift still; to be; to exist; to sum it all up in the moment as she passed; turned, caught her scarf in some other woman’s dress, unhitched it, laughed, all with the most perfect ease and air of a creature *floating* in its element (174, emphasis added).

Mrs. Dalloway’s role as a staged performer reaches the pinnacle of political possibilities. By pointing to Mrs. Dalloway’s “prancing” and “sparkling” dress as she escorts the Prime Minister, Woolf emphasizes a new dignity and composure of women in the public

sphere. In this moment in time, Mrs. Dalloway is the Prime Minister. Imagining the British Empire resting in her hands, she assumes a mystical hostess “lolloping” and “floating” amongst past and present worlds. As a result, “she had felt that intoxication of the moment, that dilatation of the nerves of the heart itself till it seemed to quiver, steeped, upright” (174). Her movement towards a transgressive gender identity has begun. Rajan defines “transgressive” as “a clear breakdown between the private and public spheres, and by the allusion to otherwise taboo sexual orientations” while also maintaining that “Although Clarissa appears to be a ‘proper’ British woman, upon closer inspection it becomes apparent that she does possess a political voice” (43, 45). Similarly, Garvey notes that “Clarissa appears at ease on the waves, as if she truly belonged to the ocean, just as the mermaid can signal female empowerment” (69). Through the imagery of a mermaid, Woolf reveals the beginning stages of Mrs. Dalloway’s reevaluation as a woman. She informs Sally and Peter that “I shall come back” (181). While Mrs. Dalloway has reached new heights in terms of femininity and performance, she must encounter one final act before her reappraisal as a woman—Septimus’s death.

The presence of death represents a closing performative act that binds Mrs. Dalloway’s role as actress and director. Although Mrs. Dalloway’s free swirling green dress prompts a new image of women in the public sphere, Septimus’s death represents a reexamination of her femininity. Despite Mrs. Dalloway’s attempt to direct an elaborate party of splendor, death is sudden and unplanned. When Sir Bradshaw discusses his patient, Septimus, to Richard Dalloway, Mrs. Dalloway responds by thinking, “in the middle of my party, here’s death” and asks herself, “What business had the Bradshaws to

talk of death at her party?” (183, 184). Septimus’s death forces Mrs. Dalloway to rethink her femininity as a woman as she escapes to an empty “little room” (183). Death allows Mrs. Dalloway to reflect and reevaluate her own femininity as Clarissa Dalloway since “Death was an attempt to communicate; people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew them apart; rapture faded, one was alone. There was embrace in death” (184). Woolf demonstrates that Mrs. Dalloway’s encounter with Septimus’s suicide permits her to assemble her staged roles into one cohesive gender identity. In order to reconstruct a new femininity, Mrs. Dalloway must absorb the values of tradition and modernity of the British Empire; she must make the room her own. Away from the party, Mrs. Dalloway rehearses her femininity through the old woman in the window. Parting the curtains, she observes the old woman performing the simple tasks of everyday life:

Oh, but how surprising!—in the room opposite the old lady starred straight at her! She was going to bed. And the sky. It will be a solemn sky, she had thought, it will be a dusky sky, turning away its cheek in beauty. But there it was—ashen pale, raced over quickly by tapering vast clouds. It was new to her. The wind must have risen. She was going to bed, in the room opposite. It was fascinating to watch her, moving about, that old lady, crossing the room, coming to the window (185-186)

By Woolf drawing attention to hues in the sky that were “new,” she emphasizes a freedom for women waiting on the horizon. Every movement the old woman does is simple, yet compelling. Stevenson argues that the room of the old woman “is mysterious simply because, as private space, it prohibits full public view” (123). By focusing

acutely on the old woman, Woolf draws attention to freedom awaiting women outside patriarchal control. Mrs. Dalloway must use her skills as a staged performer, acting and directing her many roles of powerful women into one entity—Clarissa Dalloway. While Septimus’s death interrupts her party, it allows Mrs. Dalloway to compress her identities into an empowered woman.<sup>20</sup> Woolf writes that “she must go back. She must assemble. She must find Sally and Peter. And she came from the little room” (186). Stevenson contends that “Her femininity is theater garb to be gathered to greet an old lover and friend” (125). “She must assemble” refers to Mrs. Dalloway integrating the spirit and freedom of the past, while also suggesting a new woman seeking to gain confidence and fortitude. When she reemerges from the little room, Peter notices her changed air as he wonders, “What is this terror? what is this ecstasy? he thought to himself. What is it that fills me with extraordinary excitement?” with Woolf concluding that “It is Clarissa...for there she was” (194). Different emotions surround Peter as he greets Mrs. Dalloway from the room. By connecting “extraordinary excitement” to “Clarissa,” Woolf points to a new lens of viewing modern women. Deborah Guth contends that “like her mirror image, she has shut out the external world to bask in the self-reflecting light of vision where self and imagined other can become one while remaining distinct” (38). No longer silent, Mrs. Dalloway fits Stevenson’s observation that “women sit in rooms, they decorate them, and they constitute its symbolic manifestation” (118). Women, then, are not objects in the room, they “are the ‘creative force’ *of* instead of *in* the room” (118).

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<sup>20</sup> Mrs. Dalloway’s reappraisal of her femininity amongst death reflects Woolf’s enduring imagination during a collapsing nation where WWII “became more beautiful than before; a bomb had burst the river bank and the waters of the Ouse, pouring out over the water-meadows, swept right up to her garden and formed a lovely inland sea visited by multitudes of water fowl. This was a source of great delight” (Bell vol. 2: 222).

What begins as a performative quest of “Mrs. Dalloway” suitably ends with “Clarissa” emerging from a room. Although Mrs. Dalloway does not radically transgress and redefine femininity, Woolf outlines the role of performance in illuminating the possibilities for women in post-war Britain through a protagonist who imagines future success.



Like Woolf, Fitzgerald illustrates how the presence of death points to a reappraisal of gender identity in post-war America. Although Gatsby’s performance achieves new political heights, Fitzgerald denotes that Gatsby must assemble his roles as an actor to maneuver and construct his new masculinity. Gatsby fights to keep Daisy’s purity alive. Nick observes that “Daisy and Gatsby danced. I remember being surprised by his graceful, conservative fox-trot—I had never seen him dance before” (105). In this moment in time, Gatsby’s masculinity thrives as Daisy is completely won over by Gatsby’s performance. Similar to Woolf’s depiction of Mrs. Dalloway as a floating and lolloping mermaid, Fitzgerald points to “a new well-being” in the public eye. His dream is in the past and ever so distant. But this does not cause Gatsby hesitation in the slightest since to “return to a certain starting place and go over it all slowly, he could find out what that thing was” (110). Gatsby, like Sally Seton, marks an emblem of the past that presents Nick a world of tradition and creativity. When Nick tells Gatsby that he cannot repeat the past, Gatsby simply retorts, ““Can’t repeat the past?” he cried incredulously. ‘Why of course you can!’” (110). Gatsby’s attachment to the past defines the ensuing scene at the Plaza Hotel, where a lively entertainer confronts an overbearing jock. He tells Tom, “Your wife doesn’t love you...She’s never loved you. She loves

me” and that “No, we couldn’t meet. But both of us loved each other all that time, old sport, and you didn’t know” (130, 131). Thus, the passage of time only strengthens his desire to be with Daisy. Going against Tom, Gatsby is courageous, bold, and willing to do anything to protect Daisy. Although Tom threatens Gatsby with “I’ve made a little investigation into your affairs—and I’ll carry it further to-morrow,” he does not have the last word (133). Rather, the car accident that immediately follows showcases Gatsby’s expertise as a magician. When Nick leaves the Buchanan’s house to wait for a cab, Gatsby magically appears. Nick notes that “I hadn’t gone twenty yards when I heard my name and Gatsby stepped from between two bushes into the path. I must have felt pretty weird by that time, because I could think of nothing except the luminosity of his pink suit under the moon” (142). Gatsby’s act as a magician allows him to suddenly intervene in the conversation swirling around Myrtle’s death. While overwhelmed with the destruction his car caused, Gatsby’s glowing costume represents his determination to defend his honor. Even though Daisy was driving, Gatsby insists on taking the fall, telling Nick “but of course I’ll say I was” and that “I tried to make her stop, but she couldn’t, so I pulled the emergency brake. Then she fell over into my lap and I drove on” (143, 144). In addition, he commits himself to guarding Daisy’s house, saying to Nick, “I don’t trust him, old sport” (144). Thus, Gatsby’s performance as a magician and romantic wanderer intensifies his desire to explore and expand beyond post-war conventions of masculinity in America.

In the end, Fitzgerald reveals that Gatsby consequently falls prey to consumer culture. Brown points out that “With the American Dream in transition—emphasizing now the consumer creed of ‘having’ rather than the old promise of ‘becoming’—Jay

Gatsby has no place” (169). As a result, he loses Daisy, believing that his dream will emerge from the ashes. At the scene of Gatsby’s murder, Nick documents that “The touch of a cluster of leaves revolved around it slowly, tracing, like the leg of transit, a thin red circle in the water” and that after observing Wilson’s body believes “the holocaust was complete” (162). The word “holocaust” is very revealing. Brown argues that Fitzgerald’s use of “holocaust” represents “a sacrifice, and Gatsby—a romantic, and idealist, and a star-crossed symbol of America’s transcendent possibilities—represents the failure of his civilization to create a higher purpose” (168). Although Brown is correct in his assertions that Gatsby achieves little in regards to radical change, Gatsby’s performance does set the tone for Nick’s own interpretation of masculine identity in post-war America. The scene prior to Gatsby’s death represents Fitzgerald’s own critique of capitalism as he presents Gatsby standing apart from society. Nick reflects that Gatsby:

must have looked up at an unfamiliar sky through frightening leaves and shivered as he found what a grotesque thing a rose is and how raw the sun light was upon the scarcely created grass. A new world, material without being real, where poor ghosts, breathing dreams like air, drifted fortuitously about (161).

Although Gatsby may have succumbed in his role as Trimalchio, his death prompts Nick to inevitably question and be wary of a materialist society. Fitzgerald’s use of “grotesque” and “frightening” offers the damages capitalist regime presents to tradition and creativity. Awakened to societal limitations, Nick sets out to recapture what Gatsby started: a repetition and revision of a romantic dream that carries the potential for a radical future.



Gatsby's death influences Nick to persist in categorizing and directing a new masculinity. Will contends that "Jay Gatsby, a figure marked by failure and shadowed by death throughout most of the novel, nevertheless achieves a form of greatness in the final paragraphs of his story; it is at this point, in the words of Lionel Trilling, that Gatsby 'comes inevitably to stand for America itself' " (125, Trilling 1963). Although Gatsby has gathered the pieces, it is Nick who must finish an elaborate performance. Brown correctly points out that Nick "comes closest in the novel to Fitzgerald's notion of a 'noble' personage" (167). Though absent from the stage, Gatsby assists in Nick's role, with Nick imagining him saying "Look here, old sport, you've got to get somebody for me. You've got to try hard. I can't go through this alone" (165). Rehearsing Gatsby's part as director, Nick's first task is to assemble Gatsby's acting roles into a concise gender identity. When Mr. Gatz arrives to Gatsby's mansion, he carries remnants of Gatsby's early dreams to rise in society. Upon first entering his son's mansion, he maintains that "He had a big future before him, you know. He was only a young man, but he had a lot of brain power here" and that "If he'd of lived, he'd of been a great man. A man like James J. Hill. He'd of helped build up the country" (168). By comparing Gatsby to James J. Hill, a man known as "The Empire Builder," Fitzgerald inserts his notions of the creative artist. Similarly, after showing Nick a daily schedule constructed by Gatsby, Mr. Gatz says "It just shows you, don't it?" and that "Jimmy was bound to get ahead. He always had some resolves like this or something" (173). While Woolf demonstrates that Mrs. Dalloway overshadows the Prime Minister, Fitzgerald reveals that Gatsby plots out a future where any man has the opportunity to thrive. Saunders writes that "Unlike Tom Buchanan, Gatsby thinks in terms of ideals and absolutes" (167).

While Tom recaptures Daisy, Fitzgerald satirizes the extent of his triumph since it is Gatsby's performance Nick categorizes into a remembered hero through writing, documenting, directing, and acting.<sup>21</sup> Even two years later Nick still remembers "those gleaming, dazzling parties of his were with me so vividly that I could hear the music and the laughter, faint and incessant, from the garden, and the cars going up and down his drive" (179). Thus, it is Gatsby's creativity and romance that Nick remembers, not the material culture of the Roaring Twenties. By concluding his account of Gatsby and the green light, Nick brings Gatsby's performance back into the limelight. Though deceased, his legacy carries on through Nick, where Nick writes in a famous passage:

Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter—to-morrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther....And one fine morning---  
So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past (180).

Nick rehearses Gatsby's traits of adventure and mysticism, while searching and striving for truth. Will notes, that "What matters to Gatsby is what matters to 'us;' Gatsby's story is 'our' story; his fate and the fate of the nation are intertwined" and that Gatsby is "essential to the novel's vision of a transcendent and collective Americanism" (126). Gatsby's death causes Nick to turn his back on capitalism while rethinking his own masculine identity as he reflects on memories of the Middle West. Nick remembers the "thrilling returning trains of my youth, and the street lamps and sleigh bells in the frosty

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<sup>21</sup> While Tom recaptures Daisy, Brown maintains that "Fitzgerald portrays Buchanan wealth as the worst possible kind, for it comes without the mutual marshalling of lord-to-peasant/peasant-lord debts, obligations, and duties that Scott thought distinguished the old money from the new" (164).

dark and the shadows of holly wreaths thrown by lighted windows on the snow” while maintaining that “I see now that this has been a story of the West, after all” (176).

Through Nick, Fitzgerald reveals a revival of youth and tradition, while also displaying rejection of wealth and prestige. By recounting the events surrounding Gatsby in first person, Nick assumes narrative control of a stellar performance. While no radical change occurs, Fitzgerald highlights Nick’s move back West signals an individual escaping the confines of the gilded cage and reinserting his creative voice.



In their post-war novels, Woolf and Fitzgerald draw on characters that venture beyond the constraints of British and American societies. Butler’s theory of gender performativity emphasizes the creativity and imagination underlying Mrs. Dalloway and Gatsby’s need to act, direct, and rehearse a new, progressive gender identity onto the public stage. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf depicts a woman carefully sewing the pieces of a hybrid-femininity apart from traditional domesticity. Similarly, in *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald demonstrates a romantic wanderer magically leaving his imprint on Nick. While performance allows Mrs. Dalloway and Gatsby to begin challenging and reappraising their goals, no radical change towards femininity or masculinity arises. Despite this, Woolf demonstrates a woman visualizing future success for modern women, while Fitzgerald reveals how Gatsby’s self-invention inspires Nick to escape capitalism and remember a creative performance. Thus, in situating their novels amongst elaborate performances and romanticism, Woolf and Fitzgerald draw attention to foreseeable change for femininity and masculinity beyond the gilded cage.

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